


SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Spring 2009

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The mission of
Fellowship in Prayer:

to encourage and support
a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice
of prayer, meditation,
and service to others,

to help bring about
a deeper spirit of unity
among humankind.



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while also conveying a deeper
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Called to be *For* Giving

I think we all collect little “gems” of wisdom along the way—words, ideas and experiences—that help us make sense of our lives. I recall someone once saying that forgiveness requires us to take a stand, to be *for* giving. This concept is one I often revisit. I believe such generosity of heart is essential if after tragedy or injustice, we are ever to find the strength necessary to gather up our pain and disappointment, accept whatever losses we have incurred and affirm the original blessing that is life, opening ourselves once again to the goodness within the human community.

Naomi Tutu, in our featured interview, reminds us that forgiveness is a conscious choice rooted in truth, and reconciliation depends on the acknowledgment of the evil, ignorance or oversight that creates situations for which forgiveness is needed. She points out that after apartheid ended in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission helped people work through the process of forgiveness in the public forum, with and without restorative justice. Other victims of violence, like the people behind the stories of The Forgiveness Project, stand as shining examples of the power of forgiveness as they let go of bitterness and resentment to find healing and live with compassion.

We might be tempted to relegate these individuals to otherworldly stature or quietly assign them to the company of the naïve because then, we can breathe a sigh of relief, knowing we don't have to live up to such high standards. However, we exist in an imperfect world, so we come face to face with the need for forgiveness multiple times on any given day. It is simply not a challenge we can avoid and we will only be *for* giving in the most trying of times if we have been trying to be *for* giving all of the time. Forgiveness is not a once-and-done decision; it is a way of being in and about the world. It is a standing commitment to open-heartedness.

All great religions speak to forgiveness. It is a deeply rooted value, seen as important in achieving personal equanimity and peace, as well as in forging harmonious relationship. It is a gift of grace; a wellspring of hope, and it is difficult, mysterious in many ways. Hence, we are surprised by forgiveness whenever we encounter it. Perhaps, this is because it is a place where the divine and human meet.

As you read this issue of Sacred Journey, take some time to quietly rest in the moment, to let peace wash over you like a pebble at the bottom of a riverbed, to reflect on the presence of forgiveness in your life and to discover welcome companionship among those who, like you, are walking the way of forgiveness.



Janet M. Haag is the Executive Director of Fellowship in Prayer.

An Interview with Naomi Tutu



Naomi Tutu is the third child of Archbishop Desmond and Nomalizo Leah Tutu. The challenges she encountered growing up black and female in apartheid South Africa led her to become a human rights activist. Naomi Tutu holds degrees from Berea College and the University of Kentucky and an honorary doctorate from Bentley College in Massachusetts. Her professional experiences include being a development consultant in Africa, a program coordinator for various race relations programs, as well as an internationally

recognized motivational speaker and retreat leader who communicates her passion for human dignity with humor and a wonderfully appealing personal touch. Ms. Tutu has taught at the University of Hartford, University of Connecticut, and Brevard College. With Rose Bator, her colleague at Sister Sojourner, she is co-authoring a book, provisionally titled "I Don't Think of You as Black: Honest Conversations on Race and Racism." Ms. Tutu acts as a consultant to two organizations that reflect the breadth of her commitment to human rights, the Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence (SAIV), founded by renowned author Riane Eisler and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Betty Williams, and the Foundation for Hospices in Sub-Saharan Africa (FHSSA). Ms. Tutu is a single mother of three, currently residing in Nashville, TN. Fellowship in Prayer was delighted to have an opportunity to converse with Naomi Tutu about spirituality and social advocacy, and the challenge of forgiveness. We hope you will find her words and experiences meaningful as you grapple with these issues in your life.

Fellowship in Prayer: As an internationally recognized speaker and consultant on gender, race, and international relations, how do you think spirituality impacts human rights advocacy and social action?

Naomi Tutu: Well, I can really only speak from my own experience, having been raised in apartheid South Africa. The connection I feel with people in situations of oppression motivates me to be an activist.

I believe we have all been made by God and are part of a universe that our God planned as a place to sustain and support life, to empower creation. So for me, being a human rights activist is deeply spiritual. It is my attempt to be a partner with God in the fulfillment of His plans. I believe our connections with one another occur through our connection with God and our connection with God occurs through our connections with one another. If we believe in a God who loves us, watches over us, is happy with us, mourns with us, celebrates with us, then we have no choice but to be about the work of making this world a better place for all of God's children.

In light of what you just said about spiritual connections, why do you think there are still so many people who say they feel disconnected?

I believe one of the reasons for feeling disconnected is that we are afraid of losing what we have. Picture children who are playing and are told, "Share your toys." Their first reaction is often "No!" It is as if they are thinking "If I share, if I give, I will lose something." However, when children do share, they generally find sharing expands their experience. I believe that initial reaction of fear is the source of disconnection. As adults, many of us hold onto the childish concept "if I share, I lose" and apply it to so much about our world. I think I have to protect what I have, or might have, and so I am always looking for someone who is out for what I have. Our fear is not based on any real threat but if we assume people are jealous or

covetous or we distance them by presuming they are not like us, then we disconnect. In apartheid South Africa, white South Africans could be heard saying over and over, "Well, they are not like us, black people are not like us." Even today, if you go to areas of conflict and oppression in the world, that is the first thing you are likely to hear, "They are not like us." If we were to admit those we are oppressing are like us, then we would have to stop and ask ourselves, "How can we be oppressing them?" The reality is we are like them and they are like us. In fact, they are us!

apartheid:

meaning *separateness* in Dutch (which is cognate to the English apart and -hood) — was a system of legal racial segregation enforced by the National Party government in South Africa between 1948 and 1994. The vestiges of apartheid still shape South African politics and society.

Are you saying that if we recognize our sameness, then we are more likely to give up power over one another?

I don't want to oversimplify but I have found that even in personal relationships when an individual has to build himself up by belittling another, even someone he professes to love, that person really has a very low opinion of himself. A lot of what we see and hear around the world is based on this idea—if a person or group of people is as good as I am, then how can I be any good? It is as though in order to maintain some certain level of self-respect, I have to be sure there is somebody out there who is less than I am. I think this is probably where we start going wrong, when, in order to have a sense of ourselves, we need to have somebody who is less than we are.

Do you consider helping people realize their connection with other people to be a part of your work?

Yes, it is part of my work. I always go back to having had the experience of growing up under apartheid. I saw both the best and the worst of people in that situation. I am convinced one way we can start changing the pattern of disconnection is to stop ourselves from trying to make God really small. In many conflicts the statements we make suggest God is really small. We say things like, “My God can only be my God. My God cannot be *your* God. If you don’t do all the things that I do to worship God, then *your* God is not the *real* God.” In effect it is saying, “My God is bigger than your God,” but in reality I have made God very tiny, in my image, to look like me, to agree with me in the way I worship and the way I interpret and live God’s Laws. On the other hand, if my God is big, then in all of the different ways individuals and cultures live and celebrate, I can see God because God can see a reflection of Herself. That is an amazing God! We don’t very often bring ourselves to see God in this way. We think we have to own God and make God into our image, whatever we call God—the Great Spirit, Allah, Yahweh. I believe the only way we can start to change our view of each other is to change our view of God. If we say this is God’s universe, then we have to believe God is at least as creative as we human beings are. If human beings can come up with all these many different ways of honoring God, of saying and doing things to worship Him, then I would think there has to be a part of God present in all of them. I imagine my God is big enough, great enough, to welcome all these expressions of worship as worthy.

Just a few moments ago you mentioned that as you grew up under apartheid you saw the best and worst of people. How did you see good in what was such an unjust and difficult situation?

Although I grew up in a segregated black community, I nonetheless experienced a community that encouraged and supported the best in us, its young people. I experienced a community that said, “The government and the laws of this country can tell you that you are less than others, that you will never be equal to a white South African, that you will never achieve greatness, but we tell each of you that

we see in you the future and the hope of our country.” Their support was practical and shared; it meant the neighborhood community was as proud of us as our parents were when we did well in school. The church community called young people up to the front of the church to honor us, our beauty, our courage, and our faith. They acknowledged the greatness and possibility within us all the time and their affirmation stood in the face of the violence of apartheid.

Did you remember feeling afraid knowing your father was so involved in speaking out against apartheid?

Yes, I very much remember feeling afraid, and feeling angry. I answered phone calls that were death threats against my father. I lived in a community where people my age had already been jailed and tortured. My friend’s father was taken to Robben Island, the isolated prison for many South African dissidents, and his family was rarely permitted to see him. Another friend’s mother was always being detained. While I was in boarding school I remember once being called into the matron’s office to be told my mother had been beaten up by the police on her way to a funeral. I experienced the threats and reality of violence. But in the context of what was going on in the larger community, I also realized that I was extremely fortunate. Most of the time, my parents were there, which was not the reality for the vast majority of people with whom I grew up.

Both you and your father have spoken at various times about the African concept of *ubuntu*. Please tell us what that means and why it has been important in your life?

Ubuntu is a concept that is hard to translate. It is a Nguni word that really means humanness or kinship. In our community when you say someone has *ubuntu*, it is one of the highest compliments you can give. It means that person is truly human, shown by how they treat others. If you were to see an adult speaking to a child as though that child were an equal, you might say that person has *ubuntu* because

they have seen the worth of that child. Someone who opens their home to the homeless and the hungry, that person has *ubuntu*. This idea goes back to what I said at the beginning about our connection with other people. A person who has *ubuntu* recognizes how connected we are to one another and doesn't just speak about it but lives it. You can have *ubuntu* at some times and not have *ubuntu* at others. I always strive towards *ubuntu* but I am sure my children will let you know that we don't have *ubuntu* around us all the time.

Do you teach them *ubuntu*?

I try to teach them this concept. Like everything else, *ubuntu* is a process. Very few people can live every aspect of their lives showing they recognize their connection with others and with the universe as a whole. What we try to encourage is the intent to live a life of *ubuntu*—respect for others, seeing in others the image of God.

You have been quoted as saying you learned from your parents that what you achieve is not yours alone. Would you elaborate?

There is an African proverb that reads, "A person is a person through other people." The notion that a person is self-made is a myth; a self-made person is nonexistent. Anytime you achieve anything you just have to look back five minutes to see who helped you get where you are. My parents introduced this idea to me in very basic ways. I played a lot of sports in high school, both in South Africa and England. I played field hockey and net ball. Sometimes, I would come home from a field hockey match and exclaim, "I scored the winning goal! I scored the winning goal!" My parents would respond "Yea! That's great! But if the rest of the team hadn't been out there, you wouldn't have been able to score. You did not start the match, take the ball, go through all the defenders, do all the rest of it, and score that goal all on your own." My parents helped me see that every step along the way there was somebody who supported me—whether it was a teammate who passed me the ball so I could

shoot to score the goal or the coach who trained me. Anytime you look at any achievement in your life, look back five minutes and see who was there, who helped you, even if they were simply cheering you on. I love to hear these stories of people who claim to be self-made successes saying, "I started off in my mom's garage." Hold on a minute, your mom's garage? Then, how did you do it yourself? If there hadn't been your mom's garage, then where would you have been? Or someone else might say, "I started off with only \$2,000 dollars that my friends gave me." Oh wait, your friends supported you? You see, the whole concept of a self-made person is invalid.

Your father would never claim to be a self-made person but he is certainly considered an icon of forgiveness and reconciliation, not just for South Africa but for the world. Would you share one of your fondest memories of how your father conveyed the importance of forgiveness to you?

I have to laugh at what comes to mind when I hear this question. It probably isn't a fondest memory but it was certainly an important opportunity to learn about forgiveness. Let me tell you the story. On June 16th, 1982, two weeks before my wedding, a group of us went to a Youth Day Commemoration in Soweto, marking the day in 1976 when youth took to the streets and some of them were killed as part of the struggle for freedom and democracy in South Africa. My father was one of the speakers for this event. I went with my fiancé and my sisters, along with some other family members who had come early for our wedding. My fiancé and I were among the people who were beaten up by the police on the church grounds after the service. Once my sister located my father, we were taken to the hospital and then to the police station to lay charges of assault against the police—one of the ironies of South Africa at the time. When we got home, as you can imagine, I was fuming, angry and upset. I went to my father and demanded, "Would you still say that we need to forgive them after all this?" There I was, standing in front of him with cuts and bruises; my fiancé had a broken nose and a cut made in his

face by a whip. My father responded, "Actually, I am not the person who has been beaten, so I can't tell you that you have to forgive, but I would like to think that if I had been the one beaten, I would be able to forgive." This is the most important lesson to be learned about forgiveness. You can't ever make yourself or someone else forgive or even want to forgive. You can only live your life in a way that says forgiveness is an option. What my father taught me that day is that the ability to forgive is power, a personal power you have to reach for.

How does God fit into forgiveness and reconciliation for you?

The most basic role that God plays in forgiveness is revealed in the first prayer that many Christians are taught; the *Our Father*. I remember as a young child saying the "Our Father" without really listening to the words. We said this prayer every night before we went to sleep for as far back as I can remember. At some point when I was growing up, I began to take apart the phrases so it wasn't just a rambling ourfatherwhoartinheavenhallowedbethyname...I started actually listening to what I was saying. In the first part of this prayer, we honor God and then one of the first things we ask for ourselves is for God to forgive us and teach us to forgive. So right in this familiar prayer we so often say without thinking is our first lesson around what our relationship with God and one another needs to be based on—forgiveness.

Do you ever wonder how Jesus was able to say from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"?

It is hard to imagine but I think it is really important to put this statement alongside another Jesus said at around the same time, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me." The reason this is important is because I remember going to Sunday school and hearing all these stories of the wonderful child Jesus and thinking, well, what the heck does that have to do with my life? He has it made already. He is the Son of God. Nothing is going to faze him. He can do all this stuff.

It was only after really listening to the whole story, including how Jesus was tempted and realizing he had hard times too, that I was able to see Jesus as a model for my life. If Jesus didn't face the same temptations and struggles we face, then really, he would not be a fair role model. If we think everything was easy for Jesus, then how can we as human beings even try to do what Jesus did? On the cross, Jesus said with some feeling of despair, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Yet, Jesus is the same person who was able to say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." This is the lesson. This is the place of empowerment for me. We can be in the midst of the struggle, feeling the desperation of being frightened and alone, asking why is this happening to us, and we can still be able to forgive.

Both you and your father have noted, "Real reconciliation is not possible without truth." Why is truth so essential to this process?

For me, reconciliation is about healing. If you don't admit the truth, if you are not clear about what you are healing from, then you cannot start the process of healing. Let's look back once more—I grew up with sisters and a brother. Sometimes, we would get into fights and I might slap my sister. (This didn't happen often in my family because my parents really did try to teach nonviolence in our home but every once in a while it occurred.) Then we would have to start to reconcile, but if I said, "I never slapped you," the process of reconciliation could not begin. I felt embarrassed to admit having done wrong or having been violent but how can any healing of the wound begin if there is no admission the wound occurred! This acknowledgment takes us back to the basic level of what is necessary for forgiveness.

Can you take this idea of truth and reconciliation to the world stage?

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established after the abolition of apartheid, demonstrated the importance of claiming the whole truth of a situation in order to move toward

reconciliation. The victims and perpetrators of violence were invited to come forward to be heard. The Commission never told them they had to forgive although they did ask, "Are you able to forgive; are you ready to forgive?" Many said, "Yes, I am able and ready and want to forgive." Others said, "I am not ready yet." Still others said, "I don't think I will ever be ready." Accepting the validity of each of these positions helped to facilitate the transition to full and free democracy in South Africa. You know, as difficult as it was, people didn't even have to show remorse to qualify for amnesty. There were those who requested permission to go and ask forgiveness from the families of those whom they had killed. There were policemen who asked forgiveness from mothers who had lost their sons. These officers told these grieving women the stories of what happened to their sons, of how they died and they also told them their own stories, what brought them to be perpetrators of violence. In this way, those related to the victims were able to begin to heal and reconcile. You know these things never happen in a vacuum. We all bear some responsibility when violence and abuse occur—whether we were there and didn't know or didn't want to know, or knew and didn't do anything to stop it. Through The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we were able to claim the whole of South Africa's history, including the violence that marked apartheid. We are the country that gave the world Nelson Mandela, a man who came out of prison magnanimous, even inviting his jailers to his birthday celebration. He is an amazing human being. But we are also the country that gave the world Eugene de Kock who has been labeled as Prime Evil, who talked about slaughtering families as they slept, about running a *Vlakplaas*, a torture and murder camp. As South Africans, we must be truthful and admit that we gave the world both Mandela and de Kock and each of them are part of our story, part of our truth, part of our history, bringing us to where we are today. I often find around the world that people are not willing to tell their whole story and are not willing to listen to the whole story of anyone they identify as *other*. For instance, in the Middle-East, there is a Palestinian story and there is a Jewish-Israeli story. Most people don't want to

hear both stories. By not listening to each other, we build a picture of one another that has very little to do with who the other really is and a lot more to do with our own story about ourselves and about them. Until we can sit down together, tell our stories, listen to each other, and see where our stories intersect, whether it's one of an individual, a community, a nation, or a religion, we can't be at peace. Even here in the United States, we have the stories we tell ourselves over and over again about ourselves, about who are our friends and who are our enemies. These stories in which we categorize ourselves and others tend to be very simple. However, if you look at your life, is your own story very simple? Are you simply all good or all bad? No! So, how can we expect that another person, community, nation or religion has a simple story in which they are all good or all bad? Yet, we tend to want simple explanations. It goes back to that idea of making God really small by saying, "Your God cannot possibly be my God." Why not? What is it that makes you so sure your God is not my God? We are the ones making up the stories about God. How different would it be if we allowed God to speak for Himself—Herself—Themselves? Reconciliation can only happen when we are willing to speak and listen to the truth.

What role does prayer play in the process of forgiveness?

For me, prayer is fundamental but I have to say that I have a broad view of prayer. I don't believe people pray only when they're kneeling in quiet. This idea partly comes from my experience as a mother with small children when the only place I was able to pray was in the shower. This was the one place where I could shut people out and have quiet time for concentration. For me, prayer is a place where we have a chance for silence, to listen to what arises within us—our concerns, our fears, our hopes, and then we can put these before God. But this can't be where it ends. Prayer is like food, the sustenance to continue, to try to improve, or to try things that we might not otherwise try. In terms of the process of reconciliation, prayer gives us the opportunity to admit wrongdoing to ourselves and to

God. Prayer is the place where I first ask forgiveness from God, and hopefully, then find the courage to go and ask forgiveness from the person I have wronged. Prayer is also the place where I give thanks to God, and then show my gratitude in my everyday life by helping someone else. Prayer is the starting place, really. Of course, there are times when I forget to pray. There are times when I am brushing my teeth and will look at myself in the mirror and think, Oh my God, I didn't give thanks for such and such, or I didn't confess to such and such, or I didn't remember to pray for so and so, and I'll do it right then and there—as I'm brushing my teeth. I say this because I so often think people use a failure to pray as punishment. I don't believe that is what God meant prayer to be. It is not as though God says, "Oh, you do not pray every day, what a terrible person you are!" All of us pray in different ways. We might not even be aware we are praying sometimes. We might be giving thanks in our hearts for something. I truly believe that God knows when we are praying in our hearts. God knows. This is prayer. Our connection with God is there!

Thank you, Naomi.

It has been an absolute pleasure speaking with you. 



Prayer for a Cloudy Day

CATHERINE B. MIKLITSCH

Give us this day
a dry river bed
surcease from the flood
of memory
washing down
each gully, crevice,
of a troubled mind.

Forgive our failure
to extract blockages
planted in our psyches
handicaps to virtue
and forgiveness

Teach us to open our hearts.
Give us this day a second chance.

Catherine B. Miklitsch resides in Lewiston, New York. Her poetry has appeared in several publications including *The Buffalo News Poetry Page*, *Poetpourri* and a forthcoming poem in *Exit 13*.

Better Way

MARY JO DAVIS-GRANT

Sometimes . . .

Forgiveness is easy
If the hurt is not too deep
If we have love and support
If we can see and hear clearly
We can move on

Other times . . .

Caught in glue-like sorrow
Paralyzed with pain
Anger blinding us from the lessons
We are stuck

Until . . .

We are graced with knowing
We must change or die

Then . . .

We can yield to Divine Wisdom
Our Soul can release a
Profound
Simple
Prayer

"Please, Show Me A Better Way" . . . Amen.

Mary Jo Davis-Grant, Ph.D., holds workshops in dreamwork and poetry. She authored the non-fiction book *Dream Power: Can Our Dreams Make Us Well?* that won a Best Book of 2007 Literary Excellence Award for Psychology. Her collection of poetry titled *Spirit-Speak: Poetry That Honors the Sacred* will be published in 2009. She resides in Kansas with her husband.



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Cracks

YAKOV AZRIEL

Who can discern errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

PSALM 19:13

Strike the rock —
But from the crack
Will water flow?

Cleave the heavy oaken door
Locking us in our dungeon —
But from the crack
Will light come in?

Rip the thick mantle of sky
Burdened by its silent, gray clouds
That choke us as we try to breathe —
But from the crack
Will a Temple of fire descend?

Open the human heart —
As treacherous as our mocking words,
As deceitful as our clever lies,
As false as our broken vows —
But from the crack
Will faith begin?

Clear me, Lord, from hidden faults.

Yakov Azriel has published two books of religious poetry, *Threads From a Coat of Many Colors: Poems on Genesis* and *In the Shadow of a Burning Bush: Poems on Exodus*. Twelve of his one hundred fifty published poems have been acknowledged in international poetry competitions.

Can Forgiveness and Peace Come to Israel and Palestine?

Based on a Compassionate Listening Trip in March 2008

CHARLES STEPHENS

Have you ever been suddenly

awakened from a deep sleep wondering where you are? It was dark and at first I didn't realize that I was waking up to the crisp sound (over loudspeakers) of the Muslim call to prayer. We had flown all night to get to Israel, spent all day touring Old Jerusalem, and now this was our first morning. Soon I realized that I wasn't dreaming. I was in the Muslim Quarter of Old Jerusalem.

We were in the land long called holy by Jews, Muslims and Christians, and clearly a place of intense and divided faith among religious cousins. These three religions all claim Abraham as their spiritual ancestor, and all worship the same God. Yet they live in fear, frustration and anger. There are many tall and foreboding walls erected to identify various

claims to this land. We saw cement walls that are being built to zigzag throughout Israel and the Palestinian West Bank. We saw tall wire fences topped with razor wire around refugee camps.

I was there as a member of an Interfaith Compassionate Listening Delegation. Our delegation consisted of Rabbis, Imams, Christian Ministers, Roman Catholic Sisters, a Buddhist, a couple of lay leaders, and me—a Unitarian Universalist minister. Our goal was to listen compassionately to the stories of individuals on all sides of this divided land so in need of forgiveness. We heard inspiring stories from Israeli Jews, Palestinian Muslims, and Palestinian Christians, and witnessed a bit of what their daily lives are like.

We heard from Israeli and

Palestinian parents who had lost loved ones in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and who are now working together as brothers for peace and understanding. We heard from a woman whose parents died in the Holocaust and who, in 1948, fought to create Israel and is now a leader of an interfaith women's peace group. We heard from former

makers and other interfaith organizations. My thoughts were constantly drawn to questions about revenge and forgiveness. My heart was touched and my mind was opened by the courageous and compassionate people I encountered.

Our group was practicing "compassionate listening," a discipline that helps us listen

My heart was touched and my mind was opened by the courageous and compassionate people I encountered

Israeli and Palestinian soldiers who have become combatants for peace. We heard from an Israeli government spokesperson and from Salam Fayyad, Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority. We heard stories of Palestinians who have been living in the Al-Arroub refugee camp since 1948. And we heard from Rabbi Menachem Froman who helped found the Takoa Israeli settlement in the West Bank and is a major leader in Jerusalem Interfaith Peace-

from our heart, not from our wounds or the defensive barriers we have built to protect ourselves. The theory behind "compassionate listening" is that each of us has an internal heart essence at the very core of our being. But then each of us experiences emotional and physical wounds in life. As protection we develop physical and emotional scar tissue that we rely on to defend us against future dangers. Normally we communicate from the place



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of the defenses we have developed. Sometimes we go deeper and communicate from the place of our wounds. But “compassionate listening” challenges us to go even deeper, to the place of our heart essence—below our defenses and deeper than our wounds. When we communicate from our heart essence to the heart essence of another, we tap into the rich potential of true person-to-person communication and the possibility of forgiveness.

The practice of “compassionate listening” helped us connect on a personal basis with people of different faiths, both those we met and those with whom we were traveling. No matter our belief, the most difficult task we face is finding a way to pass through walls that have been built between ourselves and those who we may fear or refuse to forgive. We, the religious leaders in our delegation, began to experience how “compassionate listening”

helped us set aside our own religious, theological or spiritual differences and come together as people of faith.

Being an interfaith spiritual director, I was struck by the similarity of the “compassionate listening” process to that of “spiritual guidance.” When we were able to set aside not only our personal wounds but also the religious symbols, the theological words and the ways we practice our spirituality, we could hear at least for a holy moment the still small voice uniting us in compassion and forgiveness. Being in such a relationship guided us to a new understanding of one another and that violent land which might some day be a holy and peaceful land.

Following this remarkable journey, we returned home,

united in our love and respect for one another and our experience of the love that Jewish, Christian, Muslim and other people of faith can have for one another.

We Compassionate Listening Pilgrims who traveled together among compassionate and forgiving Israelis and Palestinians continue to work together to tell the stories of compassion and forgiveness that we heard and experienced. It is our hope that we will be able to channel some of the compassion we saw and experienced to those we meet today and tomorrow. We hope that in some small way we will become part of a united and growing dynamic force for greater non-violence in our area as well as in Israel and Palestine. ॐ



Rev. Charles Stephens is the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing in Titusville, NJ. www.uucwc.org

EVERY BREATH WE DRAW IS A GIFT OF GOD'S LOVE;
EVERY MOMENT OF EXISTENCE IS A GRACE.

THOMAS MERTON

I have nothing left to teach the world,
truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills.

MOHANDAS K. GANDHI

Is God vengeful, demanding a death for a death?
Or is God compassionate, luring souls into love
so great that no one can be considered an enemy?

SISTER HELEN PREJEAN

Shall I not inform you of a better act than fasting,
alms and prayers? Making peace between one another;
enmity and malice tear up heavenly rewards by the roots.

HADITH

Without passion, nothing happens.
Without compassion, the wrong things happen.

JAN ELIASON, UN

The practice of touching things deeply on the
horizontal level gives us the capacity to touch God...
We can touch the moumenal world by touching
the phenomenal world more deeply.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Forgiveness allows us to claim our own power and
not let these events destroy us; it enables them to
become events that deepen the wisdom of our hearts.

HENRI NOUWEN

Instead of separation and division, all distinctions
make for a rich diversity to be celebrated for the sake
of the unity that underlies them. We are different so
that we can know our need of one another.

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU

YOU WILL NOT BE PUNISHED FOR YOUR ANGER;
YOU WILL BE PUNISHED BY YOUR ANGER.

BUDDHA

Peace begins with a smile. I will never understand
all the good that a simple smile can accomplish

MOTHER TERESA

I will not dishonor my soul with hatred,
but offer myself as an architect of peace.

DIANE ACKERMAN

FORGIVENESS IS THE REMISSION OF SINS. FOR IT
IS BY THIS THAT WHAT HAS BEEN LOST, AND WAS
FOUND, IS SAVED FROM BEING LOST AGAIN.

St. Augustine

It's Time to be Realistic about Nonviolence in a Violent World

SUSHILL MITTAL

When I said to a friend,

"We are developing a Center for Global Nonviolence at James Madison University," he was astonished and immediately replied: "Our nation is stuck in wars that stretch from the Middle East into Central Asia. In fact, our president has declared a worldwide War on Terror. Could there be a worse time to create a Center for Global Nonviolence?"

After a brief moment of silence, my response was, "Yes, a worse time would be when everyone is lulled to sleep by a short-lived period of peace. In fact, right now is the best time to encourage people to consider alternative ways to think and take action. Everyone is awake to the fact that our fellow citizen-soldiers and many other innocent people die every day due to violent conflicts that show no signs of letting up or coming to a happy ending. This is exactly the kind of situation

that calls for us to bring our best resources together to discover more effective ways to respond to difficult contemporary challenges."

"But isn't nonviolence," he persisted, "merely a way to duck and run instead of confronting world problems head on?" I had to respond with an emphatic "No" to this question because he was confusing a commitment to nonviolence with a preference for inactivity or a passive attitude of someone who would prefer not to be involved. Nonviolence is a positive method of response instead of refusal to act in the face of troubling or even seemingly impossible situations where the odds are going against you.

"But isn't nonviolence actually an unrealistic method?" He was still unconvinced. "It may be something nice to think about, but has it ever really accomplished anything worthwhile?" Since my friend is a sensi-

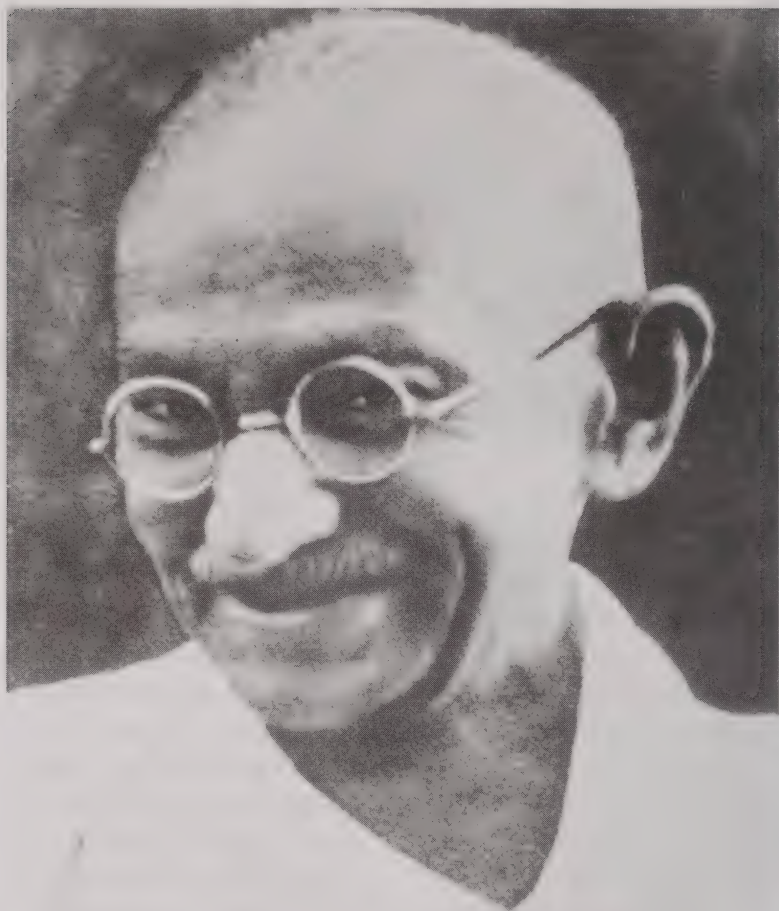


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tive and intelligent person, you might be inclined to agree with him. However if we look into the history of nonviolent action, and what it has achieved, you would be positively surprised.

Nonviolence as a strategy for change repeatedly has proven to be dangerously effective rather than too idealistic, harmless, or simply useless. It can have particularly unpleasant effects on oppressive traditions and entrenched interests that seem unaware that they are resting on unjust and unequal structures. Nashville learned that lesson in 1960 when James Lawson organized the first peaceful sit-in at racially segregated lunch counters in down-

town stores. Despite resistance by merchants, complicity of the local government, lack of protection by police, and efforts to provoke the well-disciplined demonstrators to respond directly to harassment, the campaign succeeded and contributed to a positive transformation in the city. It took Nashville a few years to absorb and consolidate the changes set in motion by Lawson's nonviolent leadership, and it took the city's premier university even longer. Vanderbilt University expelled Lawson, who was a theological student at the time, and fired the Divinity School's young Dean because he publicly protested Lawson's expulsion.



http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_Gandhi.jpg

The fired J. Robert Nelson lost his job but went on to a distinguished career elsewhere, and the Reverend James Lawson finally received long-delayed recognition when he was named Vanderbilt's alumnus of the year in 2005. Nonviolence is effective, but requires training and discipline in order to work, and can be costly to participants.

South Africa. King had studied with Howard Thurman at Boston University, and Thurman (a grandson of north Florida slaves) had a longtime appreciation for Gandhi's nonviolent methods. King advised that Lawson should contribute to change in the American south, and so he transferred from Oberlin to Vanderbilt. This story of the formation of a move-

Gandhi did not preach nonviolence He lived it

What inspired Lawson? The key event was meeting Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1956 at Oberlin College in Ohio, but it is doubtful that their meeting would have had so dramatic an outcome had it not been that both of them were already deeply influenced by the example of Mohandas K. Gandhi before they met. Lawson had served as a Methodist missionary in India and had direct knowledge of Gandhi's work there and in

ment for racial justice in Nashville is retold at length by David Halberstam in his excellent book titled *The Children*.

Gandhi, in his lifetime a man who bridged two centuries and three continents, is widely acknowledged as one of the makers of the twentieth century and a much needed counter-example to the unprecedented brutality of that century, too. He was a pioneer in the leadership of both local and national campaigns of nonviolent resis-

tance to liberate the Indian from the clutches of a cynical, rapacious British oppressor—the mightiest material power then active—that perpetuated ancient forms of racial, gender, and ethnic discrimination, but also to liberate the Christian colonizer who was subjugating because he had allowed himself to be dominated by a dehumanizing technological culture generated by the Industrial Revolution. He wanted

less technological knowledge.

Born in 1869, educated in India and England, Gandhi went to Africa in 1893 and worked there at intervals until returning to India during World War I. In the interwar period, he led two major nonviolent protests against colonialism from 1919 to 1922 and again in 1930-31. He called a halt to the first one when it became clear to him that participants were not sufficiently prepared

Education is a key to preparing people to appreciate the value of nonviolence

the British also to be free. His action was in strict fidelity to his belief and to the conclusion to which his analysis of the collision of the European with the Indian culture had led him. In time Gandhi was saying to the British that, in a second movement, they had reduced the Indians to subjection because they had first allowed themselves, however unwittingly, to be driven to being reduced to their own subjection by a soul-

to resist the temptations of violence. The second was more successful and included his famous march to the sea. The great tragedy in his life came at the end of the colonial era in 1947-48. After World War II the British government, nearly bankrupt because of the war, rashly divided India into two nations that were separated by Muslim and Hindu religious differences and then quickly departed—leaving

their former colonial subjects to suffer the consequences. An elderly and frail Gandhi traveled the country to counsel nonviolence and encourage peace. On January 30, 1948, as he was walking to a prayer meeting, Gandhi was shot dead by a man who had been motivated by violent religious hatred. Gandhi gave up his life for his nonviolent principles.

These events in Gandhi's life were well known to Thurman, Lawson, and King. They were under no illusions about the potential difficulties in a life dedicated to nonviolent action. They were realists who knew that vigilance is the price of liberty and that willingness to work and suffer is the price of justice. In 1963, when King gave his "I have a dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial, many of his most dedicated fellow activists were wearing Gandhi caps that symbolized their direct connection to the principles of the man who had been called the Mahatma, or Great Soul, of India.

Gandhi's principles have been carried forward in nonviolent protests and indeed revo-

lutions in many parts of the world. It would be impossible to list the many successes here, but mention should be made of the movement that began with Lech Walesa in the shipyards of Poland and ended with the fall of the Berlin wall as well as the independence and reconciliation movements in South Africa that were inspired by President Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Among movements that currently are active, probably the best known is the work of the Dalai Lama toward achieving resolution of the unresolved issues with China about the status of Tibet.

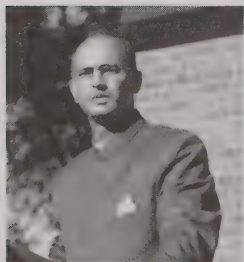
Gandhian nonviolence brings hope for the future of humanity. For Gandhi the opposite of war is not peace but *ahimsa*. The Mahatma never used the word *santi*, which is an equivalent for the English word "peace" in the sense of ultimate union of the soul with the Divine. The peace for which we usually pray and ask others to pray would be translated by the word *sandhi*, meaning truce, suspension of war. What Gandhi taught is *ahimsa*, which consists in total avoidance of harm to

another, in thought, in speech, in action. For him this is neither a doctrine nor a dogma: it is an action, an act of every moment. In contrast, more typical appeals to "Peace!" are what Hamlet would qualify as "Words, Words, Words!" in answer to Polonius' query.

Gandhi did not preach non-violence. He did not ask others to pray for it. He acted out his *ahimsa*. He never swerved from the belief that a pure, noble end must be sought and attained by the execution of pure, noble means. He vigorously eschewed the argument that some evil means can be condoned if the end happens to be satisfactory. Nor could he advocate the choice of a lesser evil as a necessity to avoid being coerced into adopting a bigger evil, for the choice of the lesser evil is always evil.

Education is a key to pre-

paring people to appreciate the value of nonviolence, the potential of nonviolent action to address conflicts, the value of social responsibility, the interconnected nature of all human experience, and the planet's natural environment. The majority of participants in the Nashville sit-ins were young students, a fact that makes sense of the title of David Halberstam's book *The Children*. At the Mahatma Gandhi Center for Global Nonviolence at James Madison University, we are exploring the significance for the contemporary world of the great task Mahatma Gandhi set for himself and for all of us as an experiment and an actual experience. "My mission," he said, "is to convert . . . the world to nonviolence for regulating mutual relations, whether political, economic, social, or religious." SJ



The Gandhi Center invites readers to participate and to contribute in any form. Learn more at www.jmu.edu/gandhicenter/.

A fellow philosophical traveler with Mahatma Gandhi, Sushil Mittal is the founding Director of the Mahatma Gandhi Center for Global Nonviolence and tenured professor of Hinduism in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at James Madison University. He lives with his wife and two daughters in Harrisonburg, VA.

The Forgiveness Project

KATY HUTCHISON AND RYAN ALDRIDGE



On New Year's Eve 1997, Katy Hutchison's husband, Bob, was beaten to death while checking on a party being thrown by his neighbor's son. In the small town of Squamish in British Columbia, a wall of silence soon grew up around the murder. It was four years before Ryan Aldridge admitted to having delivered the fatal blow. Ryan was convicted of man-slaughter and sentenced to five years in prison.

Katy Hutchison:

Less than an hour after Bob was murdered, I stood in the emergency ward beside his body, overwhelmed by a sense of peace, knowing that wherever Bob was now, it was much safer than the place he had just been. Then I went home to tell my four-year-old twins, Emma and Sam, that their Daddy was dead. I looked into their eyes and knew that I could not allow their lives to become dominated by their father's death. I promised them and I promised myself that underneath the horror of what had just happened we would find a gift.

As for the rest of the community, the code of silence began that night. No one called the police, no one spoke out. The murder was devastating, but the silence from so many compounded the devastation. In the end I had to leave town.

Eventually, after four years, Ryan Aldridge was arrested. That same day, as I was leaving the police station, I spotted him on

Part of being human is taking
an active part in repairing harm

camera, alone in the investigation room. The police had left the tape rolling and I stood and watched him falling apart. I didn't want to leave him.

After his arrest, police officers showed Ryan a video I'd made for him urging him to dig down deep to find the words to say, "I did this." Four years of silence, grief and fear then fell away as he fulfilled my wish and confessed to the crime. Those words would begin the healing process for both of us. He then stunned police by asking to meet me, and so, less than twenty-four hours after his arrest, I found myself face-to-face with the man who had murdered my husband. As he sobbed it was all I could do not to hold him. Second to the day I gave birth, it was probably the most human moment of my life.

Some time into Ryan's sentence I discovered an incredible organization called Community Justice Initiatives that was able to orga-

nize a Victim-Offender Reconciliation between me and Ryan. It took place in the prison and lasted most of the day: we spoke about almost everything—our lives, our hobbies, our families. In that meeting I told Ryan that I had forgiven him.

I've been able to forgive Ryan because of the immense sympathy I have for his mother. I understood her loss. We haven't met yet but we write and I cherish her letters. Forgiveness isn't easy. Taking tranquilizers and having someone look after your kids would probably be easier, but I feel compelled to do something with Bob's legacy. I want to tell my story to help change people's perceptions—and where possible I want to do this with Ryan by my side. I'll never understand how our universes collided – but they did, and since Bob can't make further contributions to society, then perhaps Ryan can. Whether victim or perpetrator, part of being human is rolling up our sleeves and taking an active part in repairing harm.

Emma and Sam have fully supported my choice to forgive Ryan, but others have asked, "How could you?" Bob's friends especially took a long time to understand how I could move on with my life. But something happened when Bob died and I found my voice. Forgiveness became an opportunity to create a new and hopeful beginning.

Ryan Aldridge:

Katy's forgiveness is the most incredible thing that anyone has ever given me. It changed my life. There's trouble every day in prison, offers of drugs and threats of fights, but I don't give in. My life would still be full of anger and violence if it wasn't for Katy.

I grew up in a small town. I was bullied as a child but eventually I started hanging around with a group whose life-style impressed me. For the first time I felt accepted. By the age of 16 we were experimenting with drink and drugs and the partying began.

Unfortunately I started getting into trouble with the local police and was involved in three separate alcohol-related car crashes. Separate to this, a good friend's death in a car accident totally devastated me.

On New Year's Eve 1997, a friend was throwing a party. His father was away. There were over 150 guests, and with so much

drugs and alcohol going around fights started breaking out. When a stranger came up the stairs and asked us all to leave, my friend hit him. He fell to the ground and I kicked him four times in the head. After that I moved on to another party, not knowing I'd made the worst mistake of my life.

Throughout the investigation the secret of my crime began to destroy me. I became depressed and introverted. I could well have committed suicide if, after four years, I hadn't broken my silence and admitted my guilt. My family was devastated.

I wanted to apologize face-to-face for what had happened. So, within an hour of being arrested, I wrote a letter to Katy and her

If I put myself in her shoes I think
I would have hated the person who
had done what I'd done to her

children, apologizing for what I'd done. I also asked a police officer if I could meet with Katy. I'd read about Katy in the papers but never expected her forgiveness. If I put myself in her shoes, I think I would have hated the person who had done what I'd done to her.

The big question I still ask myself is, "Why did you do this?" And I still can't find an answer. Doing time is easy compared to the guilt I'll have to live with for the rest of my life. But with Katy, Emma and Sam's forgiveness – I hope that perhaps, one day, I'll be able to forgive myself.

The Forgiveness Project works at a local, national and international level to help build a future free of conflict and violence by healing the wounds of the past. By collecting and sharing people's stories, and delivering outreach programs, The Forgiveness Project encourages and empowers people to explore the nature of forgiveness and alternatives to revenge. It is unaffiliated with any religion or religious entity. www.theforgivenessproject.com

Amish Spirituality

DONALD B. KRAYBILL

STEVEN M. NOLT

DAVID L. WEAVER-ZERCHER

Quaker theologian Sandra Cronk describes Old Order Spirituality with the German word *Gelassenheit*, commonly translated “yieldedness” or “submission.” The Amish, Cronk says, “see God working in the world with the power of powerlessness.” As they seek to emulate this paradoxical pattern, “Old Order people believe they are living the divine order revealed by Christ.” The Amish believe that submission should characterize one’s relationship with God, as suggested by the phrase, “thy will be done” In the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:10).

But a spirituality of yielding “is not just a personal experience,” according to Cronk—it expands into an ethic of yielding to one another, renouncing self-defense, and giving up the desire for justification or efforts of revenge.

Gelassenheit does not necessarily breed fatalism, however. In their everyday lives Amish people make choices, calculate risk, and plan for the future. And although they often speak of “God’s plans” behind events that are tragic or painful, they do not believe that God predestines history or that they are merely puppets in a divinely determined script. The Amish believe that humans possess choices of ultimate significance, choices such as whether or not to make a commitment to Christ. For the Amish, this decision—made as an adult and sealed by baptism—signifies a person’s entrance into church membership. Submission to the will of God can also translate into stubborn refusal to follow the government’s rules, as when Amish men rejected military induction or when Amish parents refused to send their teenagers to public high schools.

Gelassenheit has many dimensions. One aspect reflects an individual’s willingness to surrender self-will to God’s will. Ideally, a person filled with *Gelassenheit* does not argue with God. The martyrs burned at the stake for their faith epitomized the deepest



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form of spiritual yieldedness, of literally giving up their lives to God. Yet in the daily lives of twenty-first century Amish, *Gelassenheit* means yielding to church authority and being willing to accept the *Ordnug*, or rules of the church, and the collective wisdom it embodies. Moreover, a life style of humility and modesty also gives witness to the gentle spirit of *Gelassenheit*. For the Amish, the Pennsylvania German verb *uffgeevva* (to give up) captures one aspect of *Gelassenheit*: the willingness to give up one's self to the authority of the community and its God-ordained leaders, indeed, *uffgeevva* is the word the Amish typically use when speaking about submission. Its multiple meanings include giving up self-will, submitting to an authority (a parent, or the church), and yielding to God's will.

Gelassenheit also shapes Amish perspectives on women's roles in their community. Based on their understanding of certain New Testament passages and in a fashion similar to other traditional societies, the Amish hold that men are the spiritual head of the home and that wives should submit to their husbands' authority. Women with young children rarely hold full-time jobs outside of the home, although they are increasingly involved with running family businesses in addition to managing households. And although women vote on various church matters, they do not hold ministerial office or wield official authority. Men's and women's spheres of work and influence are clear, and the idea of submission is frequently invoked to describe women's relationship to men. At the same time, *Gelassenheit* is valued across gender boundaries and understood to be a desirable trait among both men and women.

What is most striking to persons accustomed to the assertive individualism of Western culture is *Gelassenheit's* ability to trump personal desire and produce submissive and self-giving behavior. Amish people practice *Gelassenheit* every day as they dress in prescribed clothing, decline to pose for photographs, and make themselves vulnerable by driving buggies amid fast-moving traffic. *Gelassenheit* shapes personalities that are not aggressive, that hesitate before responding to questions, and that express joy with a gentle smile or quiet chuckle rather than a loud, boisterous laugh. *Gelassenheit* is closely related to nonresistance, the Amish commit-

ment to taking literally Jesus' teaching to "resist no evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39). The spirit of *Gelassenheit* rejects self-defense and revenge.

The spirituality of *Gelassenheit* is "caught" as much as it is taught. Children are brought up in a world soaked in rituals and habits that express submission and endorse self-surrender. That world is also filled with people from the past—a past that touches the present—who witness to the importance of submission, nonresistance, and forgiveness.

Stories And Songs

The Amish are a story-telling people, and perhaps the best known story in Amish circles is that of Jacob Hochstetler, an eighteenth-century Amish man who lived with his family on the Pennsylvania frontier. In 1757, as the French and Indian War reached their corner of the world, the Hochstetlers awoke one night to find Native Americans attacking their cabin. Two of Hochstetler's sons, Christian and Joseph, reached for their hunting guns, but Jacob would have none of it; he forbade them to use violence. Instead, the family took refuge in the cellar. The mother, one son, and one daughter were killed. Two of the surviving sons later fathered large families, from which a sizeable percentage of today's Amish population can trace its ancestry—no doubt one of the reasons the story is so often repeated.

The tale is also told because it conveys a central cultural concern for nonretaliation and submission. A father who does not try to protect his children might appear negligent to outsiders, but the Amish see Jacob Hochstetler as modeling faithfulness to Jesus' call to nonresistance. Jacob did so, the story suggests, as a loving parent who curbed his sons' impulse to defend their lives through violent means. In this story, reprinted in genealogies, included in Amish school textbooks, and repeated around dinner tables, Jacob Hochstetler is no fool. In contrast to many popular models of manhood, Jacob offers a model of Amish masculinity that illustrates the character of *Gelassenheit*.

Nowhere do examples from the past merge with the spirituality of the present more than in Amish worship. Amish church services are awash in the language and rituals of self-surrender. Sunday morning gatherings, three hours in length, begin with hymn singing from the *Ausbund*, the sixteenth-century hymnal that includes songs written by imprisoned Anabaptists. Amish hymn singing, like other aspects of Amish life, is remarkably unhurried by modern standards. Singing a four-verse hymn may take fifteen to twenty minutes. The tunes, passed on orally because the hymnal includes no musical notation, linger in the air as members extend syllables and hold notes. In the spirit of *Gelassenheit*, not even time is forced.

Ausbund hymns speak of dependence on God and the fleeting nature of human life on earth. The Lord's Prayer is one of the hymns. Others are martyr ballads, recounting stories of biblical figures, early Christian, or Anabaptists who died as Christ did—without a fight—and left justice in God's hands, praying for the salvation of their executioners. One hymn, written by Christopher Baumann, describes his torture at the hands of authorities:

They stretch me [on the rack]
and torment me,
They tear at my limbs.
My God! To you I lament,
You will see into this.

Baumann goes on to confess total dependence on God, but his prayer is not for divine retribution on his torturers:

My God, I plead from my heart,
Forgive them their sin,
Those who inflict upon me this pain.

His words echo those of Jesus at his crucifixion who refused to defend himself as an example for others.

Excerpted from *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* © 2007 Jossey-Bass. Reproduced with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. www.wiley.com

Breathing in the Essence

CATHERINE MAKOWSKY

This morning as I sat in silence,
Candle lit,
The noise in my head diminishing,
My mind falls into my heart.

Breath comes and goes as it wills,
Mind and heart beat as one,
Resonating with a fragile rhythm,
Of breath, mind and heart united.

This painfully sweet ecstasy is so tender,
So unexpected, so fragile.
I ride a wave that enfolds me
In oneness.

Then a distant bell rings, far, far away,
Time to return, time to embrace the day,
Time to leave this precious encounter.

After living many years in the desert with a contemplative community, Catherine Makowsky returned to San Antonio where she earned her Masters Degree in Theology from Oblate School of Theology. Currently she is completing an anthology titled, *Awakening: Embracing Our Deepest Essence*. She lives in St. Cloud, MN where she finds spiritual support with a Naqshbandi Sufi Meditation group and she is an Oblate of St. Benedict's Monastery.

Sarah

ANN MINOFF

I buried my wife in the land of Canaan
Her tent is cold hardened into gray stone
Yet there is a field of trees
On the rim of the cave
A mother must stay the watch
If she needs to make a blessing
For my son and the children of my children
Her bones have a dwelling place
God will hear them speak
And His angels shall carry her blessings across the land
Until each letter has been heard
Until each letter is written in the wind
As long as my children's children shall need them

Ann Minoff graduated from New York University with a degree in Philosophy. She continued her education at the National College of Chiropractic in Illinois. Ann's poetry has appeared in several poetic publications.

Untitled

SHARON FOTTA ANDERSON

More
powerful
than
the
act
of
betrayal
is
the
act
of
forgiveness.

Sharon Fotta Anderson enjoys living in an historic village in Western Pennsylvania with her husband of nearly forty years. She writes to share her thoughts and perhaps inspire others. She says her goal is to live to serve God and hurt no one.

In a French Village (near Mirepoix)

RICHARD BOEKE

At a stone cross by a medieval church.
In the fields are sunflowers,
Lizards and blue butterflies.
The stillness is broken by cars on the highway.

Now, a few moments of tranquility
with a gentle breeze.
Look at the ancient stones.
Be at ease.

Forgive yourself those ancient stones
that have not yet passed from your life.
Live with compassion today
For yourself and others.

After serving as a US Air Force Chaplain, Richard Boeke became a Unitarian minister and peace activist. For over ten years he has served churches throughout England and is a Vice President of the World Congress of Faiths www.worldfaiths.org. Richard has also composed a dozen hymn texts and authored several books including *God is No-Thing*.

Rituals of the Heart

SANDRA H. BOUNDS

As we celebrate rites of passage—
beauty's unfolding from ashes,
joy's ouster of mourning,
light's plunder of darkness,
love's exile of hate,
Life's mastery of death—
Time stands still, sadness slips away,
and in these respites,
we hear the throb of Infinite rhythms.

Sandra Bounds is an active member of the Mississippi Poetry Society. She has served as an instructor at East Mississippi Community College and served private and public high schools in her hometown of Macon, MS.

Just Call Me Mermaid

BARBARA ALDRICH

She walked into the class

loud, and angry. I asked her name and she said "Just call me 'Mermaid,'" giving me a sarcastic look. "'Mermaid' it is," I said, smiling at her. She then stood up and started throwing things across the room and yelling and others joined in. I realized that the whole class was bent on sending me away, never to return again. (But I saw their hearts.) I saw what happened last night or this morning; perhaps lots of "last nights" or "this mornings." So I softly asked them to sit down and get to work.

Surprised at my lack of frustration, they did as I asked and one or two backed me up. I could tell I had one or two allies. Mermaid stood up and began flipping another student with a rubber toy. I asked her firmly to stop but not before someone's eye was hit. I sent Mermaid to her seat where she began to sulk, knowing that this meant stern punishment for "being bad" and par-

ents would be called.

I took care of the wounded student and followed usual reporting procedure, telling Mermaid that this would have to be reported. "I know!" she grumbled and continued to sulk. Each time she looked at me I smiled back at her. She just buried herself deeper into her book.

I studied Mermaid and wondered what made her this way, so full of anger. Then I knew what I had to do. I walked across the room and crouched down at her side and whispered to her. "You know you have to apologize." I saw her stiffen. I felt that I was asking her to do something that was foreign and nearly impossible for her to do, so I coached her. "Just say 'I'm sorry,'" I said. She kept her head down but looked across the room at the victim and got even stiffer then shouted "I'm sorry." To my surprise, it even sounded sincere. I said "Thank you, good job." Mermaid frowned and went back into

her book as if she would never come out again.

I went to my desk and took out a scrap of paper and began to write. I saw Mermaid look up from time to time. I knew she was curious but had convinced herself that this was part of her punishment. I was no doubt writing an account of what she had done. She frowned again and kept reading. "At least she's quiet", I thought. I finished writing on the scrap of paper, folded it up and put it on Mermaid's desk. She didn't notice.

The morning continued in quiet cooperation from the whole class. Mermaid did her work then continued to read. It was a long time before she noticed the folded piece of paper on her desk and she asked me, defensively, "What's this?" "It's for you," I told her. So she began to unfold it and tears came to her eyes and a smile which, no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't stop. So she tried to bury herself in her book again

but she couldn't, she looked up at me with moist eyes and muttered "Thank you". I could tell by her demeanor that praise was new to her. The note had read "I know that what I asked you to do was very difficult for you, but you did it anyway and you did a very good job. I admire your courage. It isn't always easy to do things that are hard for you. I am very proud of you."

For the rest of the day Mermaid (who finally said with a smile "And, by the way, my name is really Ariel.") was a model citizen. She not only cooperated and did her work but wouldn't allow anyone else to misbehave for the rest of the day. She left a tiny scrap of note on my desk at the end of the day that read "You're the best teacher." I kept it as a special treasure.

Ariel confirmed my belief that all any of us really want, deep down, is to be loved and accepted. 57



Barbara Aldrich resides in rural Nevada. She is a mother of six children and three stepchildren. She serves as a volunteer E.M.T. and publishes an online newsletter for her community.

Seeing I-to-I Again

JOSEPH VENEROSO

Years ago, while visiting homebound members of St. Michael parish in my hometown, Amsterdam, NY, I recognized one name on the list: Ignazio “Mike” Rolando. I used to go to his house with my parents when I was a boy. Mike was my father’s “best” friend, but the two hadn’t spoken to each other in eleven years.

Mike had suffered a stroke and was now confined to a wheelchair. “I am Valentino’s son,” I said in Italian. He took my hand and pressed it to his lips; his eyes welled up. “Why doesn’t your father come to see me anymore?” I just shook my head.

Back home, I told my dad, “I saw Mike Rolando today.” When my father made no reply, I pressed. “He wants you to visit.”

His silence prompted my mother, ever the diplomat, to explain: “Mike didn’t visit your father when he had his operation.”

“That was in 1967!” I said in disbelief.

“I was in the hospital for two weeks,” my father said in his own defense.

“Dad, Mike’s had a stroke. He’s in a wheelchair. If you want to see him again . . .”

“Let’s stay friends,” was my father’s way of cutting off this debate with me.

I couldn’t resist a parting shot: “Not if this is the way you treat them.”

A few days later, my father abruptly said, “Come on. Let’s go see Mike.”

The fondest memory I have of my father is of him walking behind me into Mike’s house and kneeling to bring himself eye-level with his friend and the two grown men (no, make that three) crying.

“Reconcile” has an interesting root: *Cilium* is Latin for “eyelash.” *Con*, of course, means “with” and *re* means “again.” Reconciliation requires both parties having the humble strength to see eye-to-eye once again.

I'm supposed to bring Christ's Gospel of reconciliation to the ends of the earth, but sometimes I think my most important mission work was accomplished just a few blocks from home.



Joseph Veneroso was ordained in 1978. After serving in Korea, Fr. Veneroso returned to the states where he attended Columbia school of Journalism. Over the years, he has both worked and written for *Maryknoll Magazine*. He currently assists at a Korean-Catholic Congregation, Queens, NY. Veneroso is a frequent guest on CNN and other news programs. His second book titled, *Good News for Today* was recently published by Orbis Books. www.orbisbooks.org. Reprinted with Permission.

The Pebble

THICH NHAT HANH

Why should you meditate? First of all because each of us needs to realize total rest. Even a night of sleep doesn't provide total rest. Twisting and turning, the facial muscles tense, all the while dreaming—hardly rest! Nor is lying down rest when you still feel restless and twist and turn. Lying on your back, with your arms and legs straight but not stiff, your head unsupported by a pillow—this is a good position to practice breathing and to relax all the muscles; but this way it is also easier to fall asleep. You cannot go as far in meditation lying down as by sitting. It is possible to find total rest in a sitting position, and in turn to advance deeper in meditation in order to resolve the worries and troubles that upset and block your consciousness.

Among our workers in Vietnam there are many who can sit in the lotus position, the left foot placed on the right thigh and the right foot placed on the left thigh. Others can sit in the half lotus, the left foot placed on the right thigh. In our meditation class in Paris, there are people who do not feel comfortable in either of the above two positions and so I have shown them how to sit in the Japanese manner, the knee bent, resting on their two legs. By placing a pillow beneath one's feet, it is possible to sit that way for more than an hour and a half. Even so, anyone can learn to sit in the half lotus, though at the beginning it may be somewhat painful. But after a few weeks of practice, the position gradually becomes quite comfortable. During the initial period, when the pain can be bothersome, alternate the position of the legs or change to another sitting position. If one sits in the lotus or half-lotus position, it is necessary to use a cushion to sit on so that both knees touch the floor. The three points of bodily contact with the floor created by this position provide an extremely stable position.

Keep your back straight. This is very important. The neck and



head should be aligned with the spinal column; they should be straight but not stiff or wood-like. Keep your eyes focused a yard or two in front of you. If you can, maintain a half smile.

Now begin to follow your breath and to relax all of your muscles. Concentrate on keeping your spinal column straight and on following your breath. As for everything else, let it go. Let go of everything. If you want to relax the worry-tightened muscles in your face, let the half smile come to your face. As the half smile appears, all the facial muscles begin to relax. The longer the half smile is maintained, the better. It is the same smile you see on the face of the Buddha.

Place your left hand, palm side up, in your right palm. Let all the muscles in your hands, fingers, arms, and legs relax. Let go of everything. Be like the waterplants which flow with the current, while beneath the surface of the water the riverbed remains motionless. Hold on to nothing but your breath and the half smile.

For beginners, it is better to sit no longer than 20 or 30 minutes. During that time, you can readily obtain total rest. The technique for obtaining this rest lies in two things—watching and letting go: watching your breath, and letting go of everything else. Release every muscle in your body. After about 15 minutes or so, it is possible to reach a deep quiet filled with inner peace and joy. Maintain this quiet and peace.

Some people look on meditation as a toil and want the time to pass quickly in order to rest afterwards. Such persons do not know how to sit yet. If you sit correctly, it is possible to find total relaxation

and peace right in the position of sitting. Often it helps to meditate on the image of a pebble thrown into a river.

How is one helped by the image of the pebble? Sit down in whatever position suits you best, the half lotus or lotus, back straight, the half smile on your face. Breathe slowly and deeply, following each breath, becoming one with the breath. Then let go of everything. Imagine yourself as a pebble which has been thrown into a river. The pebble sinks through the water effortlessly. Detached from everything, it falls by the shortest distance possible, finally reaching the bottom, the point of perfect rest. You are like a pebble which as let itself fall into the river, letting go of everything. At the center of your being is your breath. You don't need to know the length of time it takes before reaching the point of complete rest on the bed of fine sand beneath the water. When you feel yourself resting like a pebble which has reached the riverbed, that is the point when you begin to find your own rest. You are no longer pushed or pulled by anything.

If you cannot find joy in peace in these very moments of sitting, then the future itself will only flow by as a river flows by, you will not be able to hold it back, you will be incapable of living the future when it has become the present. Joy and peace are the joy and peace possible in this very hour of sitting. If you cannot find it here, you won't find it anywhere. Don't chase after your thoughts as a shadow follows its object. Don't run after your thoughts. Find joy and peace in this very moment.

This is your own time. This spot where you sit is your own spot. It is on this very spot and in this very moment that you can become enlightened. You don't have to sit beneath a special tree in a distant land. Practice like this for a few months, and you will begin to know a profound and renewing delight.

Thich Nhat Hanh originally penned these words in Vietnamese as a long letter to Brother Quang, a staff member of the School of Youth for Social Service in South Vietnam, a school he founded as an outgrowth of "engaged Buddhism." Excerpted from *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation*, © Beacon Press, and used with permission. www.beacon.org

I Have Lost The War

MEREDITH JORDAN

Yesterday, as I sometimes do when I need amusement, I went online to read my horoscope for today. The words leapt off the page at me. "The long, exhausting battle is over, and you have lost the war." I immediately burst into deep sobs of both sorrow and relief. Those words struck a cord of truth deep in me.

You see, I was born into a family that based its value on the war to save souls. My great grandfather was at one time the highest ranking general in The Salvation Army; their daughter (my grandmother) went to serve in France during World War I as one of the now famous "Doughnut Lassies," Salvation Army women who served on the front lines feeding soldiers during battle. She was eighteen at the time. I was her chosen grandchild, the one she marked with her long finger of prophesy and said, "*You will carry on this legacy.*" Of course, at age 11, I balked.

It is fifty years later, and I have just discovered that all along, I've been enlisted in the army of light workers, believing that it was my mission to help propel people to awaken to a greater truth than the everyday. I did this as a therapist and an interfaith spiritual director—having nothing to do with The Salvation Army or any religion in particular. Yet serve I did, and serve faithfully.

I also served in my personal life. I loved well and supported my partners and my children to the very best of my ability at the time. On the whole, I did a good enough job. My kids turned out to be very fine people who married very fine people and who will—one day—parent very fine children. My partners benefited from my love and from my truth. None of us escaped without a few scars, but mostly we loved, and ended, with gratitude.

Still, it's been a long, exhausting battle. This is true. Primarily, that's been played out in the financial arena, where I struggled to keep us all afloat for many years. There was a lovely respite in there for a time, thanks to a man with a golden soul who lifted me up and gave me the first glimpse of hope. In time, that left too, and I was once more on the same old battlefield, staring down the long barrel of financial fear.

And then the words jumped out at me. "The long, exhausting battle is over, and you have lost the war." I felt like a kid standing on the football field after the lights have gone out and his team has lost the big game. He still holds the football in his hand and believes he's just one more touchdown away from a winning game. Then a voice booms out from the dark stands, "Hey, kid, the game is over. You lost. You did the best you could. I couldn't be prouder of you if you were my own child (which, by the way, you are). It's time to go home and get some rest."

I felt humbled. I had *lost* the war. I lost the ability to provide financial security. I lost both a marriage and a relationship, each of which born—and still lives—in love and appreciation. It was over, and I was defeated. So much of who I am, what I have done, and how I have known myself...defeated. Those were my tears of sorrow.

In this, I found a paradox. I could suddenly relate to Richard Nixon, Dick Cheney and George Bush. I got myself into a war thing, and I lost. Now I was standing on the field, dumb-struck. How was I ever going to exit the field gracefully? I felt such profound compassion for world leaders who land themselves in this position.

Then I considered the world leaders who have been defeated and not only survived the defeat but actually survived to triumph: His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela, Thich Nhat Hahn, Miriam Makeba and Harriet Tubman. I was suddenly in the company of people I admired. I could

draw from their wisdom and example.

There were also tears of relief. A long, exhausting battle is over; I have lost the war. There is, quite simply, no more war in me. I'm done with that paradigm.

I turned to inquiry: the process taught by Byron Katie of asking four simple questions and then turning the thought around. "I have lost the war. Is it true?" Yes.

"Can I be absolutely certain that it's true?" Not until I can predict the future, which I'm currently not able to do.

"Can I absolutely know that I have lost anything?" It sure feels that way right now.

"When you believe you have lost the war, what happens? How do you react? I tell myself terrible things that I know for sure are not true. I judge myself over-harshly. I feel humbled, maybe even humiliated. My heart hurts and I cry. Hard. Very hard. I cry for me and for us all.

"Who would you be without the thought that you have lost the war?" I would be one of the millions of men and

women who did their best in difficult circumstances. Some won over their ordeals; some lost. I would be one of them, nothing more and nothing less. I would be a woman who held out her heart and gave her life her best, winning or losing.

I turned the thought around three times:

"I have won the peace." There are examples in my life where this is as true as or truer than the original thought. Whew!

"Perhaps there never was a war in the first place. I made it all up." Given my spiritual genetics, this is a distinct possibility. Food for more thought. I thought I had a mission, a purpose, but if there's no war in the first place, maybe we make up all justifications for being at war with one another or with life until our reasons finally seem *justifiable*.

"God has won the war." Even more food for thought. If I am going down in defeat, if my ego can't hold on any longer to the idea that I have to fulfill a soul-saving mission, then who better to lose to than God? She Who Loves Me More

Than Life Itself.


She's not going to imprison me, judge me, exile me, and kill me. The Creator, the Mystery, is going to take the football gently out of my hand, lay it on the ground, and lead me all the way home! I'm not losing to an adversary; I'm losing to my best advocate! Of course, there is the little problem of humbly admitting how many times I have turned my life over to God only to take it back like an oppositional child, but...I disagree.

And finally there's this: I have lost the **War!** Who wants it? I have been waving "No More War" signs since I was

twelve, first at my patents and then at the whole world. Could I lose anything better than **War?** Could it be a more joyful loss?

As my friend Linda, reading my e-mail about this, wrote back, "Get out and stay out! Good riddance. Who wants **War?**"

I'm still in the middle of everything this "one-liner" horoscope from an astrologer across the Atlantic had to tell me. This is a rich mine of lessons. I'll be spelunking for a while. But, for now, I tell you this:

I Have Lost The War! And that is reason to celebrate! 



Meredith Jordan is a psychotherapist and spiritual director. She is founder and facilitator of *The Living Spiritual Elders Project*, an eight-week discovery program featuring spiritual elders representing all spiritual traditions. She is the author of two books, *Embracing the Mystery: the Sacred Unfolding in Ordinary People and Everyday Lives* and *Standing Still: Hearing the Call to a Spirit-Centered Life*. For more information visit www.rogersmckay.org.

Dusk on the River

PEMA CHÖDRÖN

There's a Zen story in which a man is enjoying himself on a river at dusk. He sees another boat coming down the river toward him. At first it seems so nice to him that someone else is also enjoying the river on a nice summer evening. Then he realizes that the boat is coming right toward him, faster and faster. He begins to get upset and starts to yell, "Hey, hey watch out! For Pete's sake, turn aside!" But the boat just comes faster and faster, right toward him. By this time he's standing up in his boat, screaming and shaking his fist, and then the boat smashes right into him. He sees that it's an empty boat.

This is the classic story of our whole life situation.



Pema Chödrön is an American Buddhist nun in the lineage of Chogyam Trungpa, the renowned Tibetan meditation master. She is the author of many books including *Start Where You Are*, from which this story originally appeared. Excerpted in *Everyday Mind* ©1997 Tricycle/Riverhead Books.

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